

West Midlands Combined Authority Productivity and Skills Commission Call for Evidence: WorldSkills UK Response

1 WorldSkills UK welcomes the opportunity to respond to this call for evidence. WorldSkills UK is all about helping young people go further, faster in their careers; helping them gain the skills that employers need most. Through skills competitions and experiential careers advice we aim to help young people from all backgrounds get the best start in both work and life. Our extensive interaction with young people, schools, colleges, independent training providers and businesses places us at the centre of the debate on how to ensure policies are developed to deliver the best possible outcomes for young people.

1.1 With the recent election of the West Midlands Mayor, the region is well placed to tackle the productivity and skills challenges it faces. Under the leadership of the Mayor and the Combined Authority, there is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to work with business, education and key local agencies to transform the West Midlands for the benefit of its young people. As the Commission recognise, this is a region with great potential but one that has not been maximised in previous years. There is now an added urgency to ensure that transformation happens. Devolution of powers to regions such as Greater Manchester and the Liverpool City Region are happening alongside the West Midlands' own development of its new structure of government. Each of these regions have key strengths and the race is on to be the number one UK destination outside London. The West Midlands must ensure it wins this race. Brexit too makes the need for higher productivity and a broad and deep skills base essential. The Government's Industrial Strategy places an onus on regions like the West Midlands to make significant contributions to widening the pool of home-grown skills which will be necessary for a Global Britain to compete in markets on every continent.

1.2 WorldSkills UK is proud of its well established and enduring relationship with the West Midlands. Birmingham hosted the WorldSkills International Competition in 1989, fully 20 years before London had the honour in 2011. After WorldSkills London 2011, a British legacy to the competition was created. That legacy was The Skills Show. The Show has been held at the NEC every year since 2012 and it is now unarguably the number one skills and careers event in the UK, attracting over 70,000 visitors every November. The Skills Show is going to be an important ally in helping the region transform the productivity and skills of its people – specifically its young people – as we look ahead into the 2020s. It's why WorldSkills UK takes such a strong interest in contributing to the Commission's work and is committed to seeing it be a success.

1.3 In this response we set out how we believe WorldSkills UK can support delivery of improved productivity and skills in the West Midlands through:

- Extending the reach of experiential careers advice and The Skills Show
- Developing world-class standards in technical education and showcasing the region internationally

2 Extending the reach of experiential careers advice and The Skills Show

2.1 WorldSkills UK believes that the single biggest improvement that could be made to the quality of careers advice, enabling confident and informed choices, is the greater adoption of experiential learning models. This is vital in developing the youth talent pipeline for key sectors identified by the Commission. Giving young people in the West Midlands greater access to experiential careers advice will better prepare them for their working lives.

2.2 The Skills Show – the nation’s largest skills and careers event – is the premier UK platform for experiential careers advice and is a West Midlands success story. It is a major showcase for skills and hundreds of employers across key sectors of the regional economy are present to engage young people, parents and educators about the career opportunities available. With 70% of attendees coming from the West Midlands, it has actively engaged thousands of young people every year since 2012 – and it works. We know that over half of young people consider an apprenticeship after attending the Show. There is an equally powerful impact amongst educators. Immediately after the Show 97% planned to engage in some form of follow up activity; three months later fully 99% had taken part in one follow up action. This includes 90% of educators who had encouraged young people to consider a technical education route. Similarly, parents are influenced by what they see and hear – 80% were likely or highly likely to undertake some follow up activity; 73% cited researching technical careers¹.

2.3 The Show’s model, built around ‘have a go’ activities, top class expert advice and heavily featuring skills competitions, is unique – there is nowhere else in the UK that engages young people in this way. It is especially powerful for encouraging interest in apprenticeships since it allows young people to envisage their potential ‘career journey’ across a range of industries, including engineering, creative, digital, construction and retail. At The Skills Show, a young person has the opportunity to hear from an apprentice about how their life has changed since taking that route; they can experience, interactively, what an apprenticeship might be like in a workplace in the full range of skills; and they can see those skills being applied to national standards through the skills competitions. This ‘360’ perspective is only possible at an event with the scale and scope to deliver it. It’s why The Skills Show is so successful and why apprenticeships have become an integral part of its offer. Speaking at The Skills Show, Apprenticeship and Skills Minister Robert Halfon said: ‘This is the most important date in the skills calendar. This is the best of the UK – this is the future of our country right here’. We are convinced that there is the potential for The Skills Show to be strengthened and extended further to benefit more West Midlands young people and stand ready to work with the Combined Authority and Mayor to discuss how both the Show and competitions can be fully integrated into the region’s skills agenda.

Case Study: Jaguar Land Rover: developing apprentices through The Skills Show and skills competitions

One of the West Midlands’ leading companies, Jaguar Land Rover, are major sponsors of The Skills Show and enter their apprentices into skills competitions every year. Brett Gibson, a product of Warwick’s Jaguar Land Rover Academy, is one of those apprentices. At school, the careers advice he received centred on university, but while he was studying at college, his tutor suggested that he consider an apprenticeship.

Motivated by his love of cars and the opportunity to work for a highly respected global brand, Brett successfully applied for an advanced apprenticeship with Jaguar Land Rover.

Earn while you learn

“After researching the apprenticeship programme, I was determined to secure a place. For me it was a win-win situation. Not only did I get to learn from the best, but I could see the real chance for career progression within the company,” says Brett.

The success of the Jaguar Land Rover UK Retailer Network has been underpinned by its Retailer Apprenticeship Programme for over 15 years. Apprenticeships are available across four specialisms: Light Vehicle Maintenance and Repair, Vehicle Sales, Customer Service and Vehicle Parts. New apprentices are enrolled onto the Jaguar Land Rover Learner Management System to guide them through their career paths.

Brett is employed by Land Rover as a Service Technician apprentice. As well as receiving on the job training, Brett also attends the Jaguar Land Rover Training Academy, a state-of-the art facility

¹ WorldSkills UK (2017). Independent evaluation of The Skills Show 2016.

where apprentices access the latest in automotive technology. He is working towards a Level 3 National Vocational Qualification in Light Vehicle Maintenance & Repair.

Using competitions to drive up quality

Over the last five years, Jaguar Land Rover has helped kick-start the careers of almost 1000 apprentices.

“We have long recognised the role competitions play in developing our apprentices. It is a proven method for not only testing the technical skills of individuals, but also measuring key attributes including team working, communication and problem solving, all of which a successful technician needs” explains David Terry, Recruitment & Support Lead, Jaguar Land Rover Retailer Apprenticeship Programme.

Apprentices who excel in Jaguar Land Rover’s internal competitions are put forward to take part in SkillAuto, the national programme of skills competitions which are part of WorldSkills UK and are run in partnership with the Institute of the Motor Industry (IMI). This provides the opportunity for Jaguar Land Rover to assess their own training programmes by benchmarking their apprentices against others from the automotive industry throughout the UK.

David Massie, Skills Competitions Manager at the IMI echoes David’s views on using competitions to develop individuals. He says: “The activity enables apprentices to gain the high level employability skills that will drive the automotive industry forward. They are an essential part of any training programme.”

Having been put forward by his tutor at the Jaguar Land Rover Academy in 2015, Brett was again asked to take part in the Automotive Technician competition in 2016. He excelled in the National Qualifiers and secured a place to compete in the National Final, which is held at The Skills Show.

The Automotive Technician Competition is designed to reflect the work role of a light vehicle technician and over 12 hours Brett was assessed on his knowledge of fault diagnosis, component replacement and repairs.

“Taking part in skills competitions was something I was familiar with, having competed in Jaguar Land Rover’s own competitions, but what I wasn’t quite prepared for, was competing in front of 75,000 people who were visiting the show. I did enjoy the whole experience though,” laughs Brett. Impressing industry judges, Brett was awarded a Silver medal at The Skills Show.

World-class skills

Brett was supported in his competition journey by Peter Fallon, Service Manager at Land Rover. “Watching Brett in the workplace, you can see just how much he has benefited from taking part in the competitions. Having proved himself against the best young technicians in the UK, he is far more confident in all areas of his work.”

Peter adds: “We are a family run business so we are all pleased to share in Brett’s success. It is great to be able to show our clients that our technicians have been recognised nationally.”

Brett believes that competing has helped him hugely in his apprenticeship. “I certainly believe I’m a better technician, I have not only improved my knowledge but I learnt new skills as a result of taking part in the competitions. I would encourage any apprentice to test themselves and take part.”

2.4 We are working with the Careers & Enterprise Company on a programme called Skills Champions which has helped to raise the prestige of apprenticeships, technical and professional education in careers advice cold spots – reaching nearly 3,000 students, across Tees Valley, Stoke on Trent and Staffordshire, Greater Manchester, London, South East England and Cornwall. Skills Champions are former competitors in WorldSkills UK Competitions who now act as role models for the next generation of young people looking to make the most of their talents and abilities. The programme has been

operational since May 2016 and has achieved a tremendous impact in schools, as evidenced by feedback from students and teachers. For students, 76% said hearing from a Skills Champion has made them feel inspired and motivated, with a further 76% saying they now know more about technical skills based careers than before. Fully 100% of teachers are either satisfied or very satisfied with their experience of the session, whilst 91% are likely or far more likely to encourage young people to consider pursuing technical skills based careers and education. This can be brought to the West Midlands – Skills Champions are a key part of the answer when it comes to improving the advice our young people receive.

3 Developing world-class standards in technical education and showcasing the region internationally

3.1 Perhaps the most important aspect of the development of technical education to get right is to ensure the delivery of high quality standards to help businesses in the West Midlands compete with the best nationally and internationally. Standards matter for young people – and their parents – as they need to have the confidence that in taking a technical route they can achieve the same high quality career prospects that the more established university route is shown to deliver. They matter to the West Midlands, as the acid test of whether policy has been a success will be the quality of training that has been received. For employers, standards matter as through the apprenticeship levy they will be making a significant financial investment; this can reap important benefits if apprentices are properly equipped to undertake the skilled vacancies that businesses increasingly need to fill.

3.2 Clear, simple and relevant standards will underpin the quality of the technical education system, so we need to ensure that they encourage world-class delivery and performance. WorldSkills UK manages a set of standards that underpin our skills competitions. According to the National Audit Office, 62% of apprenticeships started during the period 2010-2015 were at level 2². At WorldSkills UK, we have developed hundreds of apprentices to perform their roles at the world-class level by preparing them for the international WorldSkills competition up to levels 5 and 6.

3.3 The Sainsbury Review and Skills Plan for England provide the organising focus to take competition standards to the next level. In response to skills gaps faced by the country and this region, STEM- and IT-focused sectors will be given priority. We are realigning our skills competitions to reflect this demand. New competitions are being developed in specific areas such as cyber security, health and social care, rail, and environmental sustainability, where gaps have been identified, and in areas where there is demand from potential partners. Furthermore, WorldSkills UK is involved in the development of Institutes of Technology. We recognise the potential for them to act as high quality hubs for STEM skills in the West Midlands and across the nation. We stand ready to collaborate with providers to attract students, encourage curriculum innovation and provide CPD for teaching staff based on our expertise in careers advice and achieving world-class standards in STEM.

3.4 The assessment processes that our skills competitions use are already helping employers in STEM sectors develop their apprenticeship structures. Amongst this group are some of the UK's multinational employers, a prime example of which is Toyota. They are using their apprentices' participation in WorldSkills UK competitions and development programmes to drive up their own training to a world-class standard. The adoption of WorldSkills UK competition standards in technical training programmes can inspire apprentices to develop skills beyond competence. WorldSkills UK believes that our standards can make a significant contribution to the development of high quality technical education.

3.5 WorldSkills UK can also be the portal to showcase the West Midlands' skills internationally through our membership of WorldSkills, a global organisation responsible for skills competitions. A central part of WorldSkills' remit is to organise the biannual WorldSkills Competition. This brings together over 70 competing nations with the aim of identifying the world's best in the full range of skills. At the most recent international competition in Brazil (WorldSkills Sao Paulo 2015), the UK achieved its best ever result – finishing seventh overall in the medal tables and ahead of France and Germany. 82% of the UK team achieved world-class standards. Fully 60% of the team were apprentices, with a comparable

² NAO (2016). Delivering value through the apprenticeships programme.

number in 2013. Achievement at the international level is the ultimate representation of the WorldSkills UK model. Our gold, silver and bronze medallists – a majority of whom are apprentices – can truly claim to have achieved and exceeded world-class standards. Widespread media coverage, including national BBC TV coverage, helps raise the profile of apprentices and demonstrates to a new generation the opportunities that are there to be grasped.

3.6 The next competition takes place in Abu Dhabi this October and we can use our participation to provide a platform for discussions with international partners about the benefits of doing business in the West Midlands and showcasing the high quality of our young skilled workforce. It takes place in a key region where the demand for investment opportunities is strong and the region's pitch is highly persuasive. The potential for organising, for instance, an accompanying trade mission is strong and we stand ready to work with the Mayor and Combined Authority to make it happen. Through leveraging our international reach we can help positively contribute to the Mayor's vision, making Birmingham a first class destination equal to Barcelona or Berlin.

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